

Americans are pulling together, donating to relief organizations and giving their time to help the people of the gulf coast region. That is how the American people react when they see their fellow citizens in need. Unfortunately, some people have looked at Katrina not as a chance to give, but as an opportunity for excessive profits. Some have decided to take this terrible tragedy and line their own pockets by price gouging the American people at the gas pump.

At a time when many Americans are choosing between filling their gas tanks or filling their prescriptions, oil companies are reaping record profits. People are rightly angry and frustrated with high gas prices, and they deserve to have someone on their side fighting to ensure that they do not get mugged at the gas pump. Sadly, this administration's answer has been to sit on its hands while consumers get the shake-down from the oil companies.

Eight governors, including Governor Granholm of Michigan, sent a letter to the President and Senate and House leadership urging Congress to act immediately by putting forth legislation that would return excessive, unconscionable collected profits to the consumers. As the governor stated, and I quote, "To price gouge consumers under normal circumstances is dishonest enough, but to make money off the severe misfortune of others is downright immoral."

It is obvious to me that Congress needs to protect the American people from price gouging and market manipulations. The Democratic bill, free from price gouging, is the Federal Response to Energy Emergencies bill. The FREE bill, as we call it, as authored by myself, the gentlewoman from South Dakota (Ms. HERSETH), and the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE) is our answer to our Nation's record high gas prices and oil prices.

If you look at this chart right here, from 2002 when gas was \$1.34 a gallon, all the way up to September 12, 2005, where it is up to \$2.96, that more than double. Just take it from 2004, when gas was \$1.58. It has doubled in less than a year.

Currently, only 28 States have laws on the books that define price gouging and that have enforcement mechanisms to go after those found ripping off consumers. At the Federal level, there is no oversight to protect consumers from this predatory pricing. That is why we need our legislation now, the "free from price gouging" legislation. No American should have to pay too much for gas because oil companies are rigging prices.

Our bill would give the President authority to take immediate action in the face of an energy crisis by declaring a national energy emergency. Under our bill, for the first time ever, the Federal Government would have a guideline, a definition of price gouging. Our bill would also provide the FTC, the Federal Trade Commission and the

Department of Justice with the authority to investigate and prosecute those that engage in predatory pricing, from oil companies all the way down to the local gas stations, with an emphasis on those who profit the most. This includes the gouging of gasoline, home heating oil, propane, and natural gas.

Our legislation expands the FTC's authority to more aggressively pursue instances of market manipulation, such as geographic price setting and territorial restrictions imposed by refineries.

If we look at the second chart, Mr. Speaker, which appeared this weekend in *The Washington Post*, just look at what has happened in 1 year. As of September 5, 2005 of this year, from last September, we see a 46 percent increase from the crude oil producer; a 255 percent increase at the refinery level; a 5 percent increase for distributors and retailers, and taxes remain at 2 cents difference, with a 64-cent increase to the consumer. This is price manipulation. This is the market setting not the price, but the opportunity to manipulate and, as they call it, to game the system.

So with our legislation, we want not only to stop price gouging, but also we want transparency. How does the consumer know when he is being charged a fair price for oil and gas when you see statistics like this? How is the price set? That is what the American people want to know. They want to make sure they are not being gouged or unduly taken advantage of by the oil companies, or the refineries in this case.

Our bill empowers the Federal Government to impose tough civil penalties up to triple the damages of all excessive profits of oil companies that have cheated consumers. It also imposes tough criminal penalties of up to \$100 million on corporations, and fines of up to \$1 million plus jail sentences of up to 10 years for individuals caught in manipulating the price of gas, home heating oil, or natural gas.

This bill would provide relief to those paying skyrocketing energy and transportation costs and it would expand the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program through fines for those caught price gouging.

Our bill would protect consumers from unfair gas prices and punish those who think the time of a tragedy is the right time to rob Americans of their hard-earned money. It is the right thing to do for consumers and for our Nation. I urge support of the free from price gouging bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT REAUTHORIZATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is often said by politicians of both parties that Members of Congress must act with compassion and legislate from the heart. It is my strong and fervent belief that there are few pieces of legislation that this body will consider that are more relevant to the hearts and souls of our constituents than the passage of the Violence Against Women Act.

I have looked into the eyes of women beaten by men. Those women thought that that person was their partner for life, their soulmate and their lover. I have seen the pain and rejection and the hurt on their faces as these women struggle to recover their dignity and their strength.

I have spent a great deal of my public life being involved in raising money for domestic violence shelters. In the small county where I lived and was first a county commissioner, I raised money, because I saw the need. I was involved in the board of the domestic violence shelter. For years, the Founding Fathers of the county, the power brokers, were in denial that domestic violence actually occurred in the county. When I finally got elected to the Florida State Senate, I fought long and hard to get funding for domestic violence shelters so that women and their children would have a place to go.

The purpose of this hour this evening is to highlight the Violence Against Women Act, which was first passed in 1994 and which will be on the House floor tomorrow. Before I go into any more detail, however, I would like to yield to my colleague, the gentlewoman from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO), a woman with whom I have worked closely over the 3 short years I have been here on issues affecting women and the former Chair of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues.

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE) for yielding to me, and for her steadfast support of women's issues, and particularly the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act. She has been a leader in this area and, as she said, she legislates from the heart on this issue. I appreciate her and all of the bipartisanship that has been shown in the reauthorization of this bill.

In the 5 years since the Violence Against Women Act of 2000 was enacted, we have made remarkable gains towards stopping domestic and sexual violence. But the Violence Against Women Act is due to expire at the close of September and it is time for Congress to renew its commitment.